

My name is David Hodapp and I am both a Michigan resident and a Ph.D. student at the University of Michigan. I am the oldest of 6 children, raised in a working class family by two loving parents. They instilled upon me from an early age, not a sense of entitlement, but the belief that with hard work and perseverance I could accomplish anything. I will forever be in their debt.

With a lot of hard work, I earned an appointment to the United States Naval Academy. Four years later, I graduated 10th in my class with a Bachelor's Degree in Naval Architecture. I then had the opportunity to pursue a Master's Degree in the same field. I only applied to one school, the University of Michigan, as its Naval Architecture program is the best in the country. 12 months later in June of 2006 I earned my Master's Degree, graduating with 43 credits and an 8.3 GPA.

I spent the next five years of my life as a Submarine Warfare Officer in the greatest Navy the world has ever known. Through that time, I earned my Gold Dolphins and completed certification through the Department of Energy as a Naval Nuclear Engineer. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to serve our country and lead some of the brightest and most hardworking young men you will ever encounter.

A little over a year and a half ago, as my wife and I anticipated the birth of our second son, we made the difficult decision to seek a career outside of the military. As I considered various jobs, I sought out and pursued only the very best opportunities as characterized through their growth potential. In the end, I received job offers from three different Fortune 500 companies, all with six-figure starting salaries.

Somewhere along the way, a revered Professor and mentor of mine from the Naval Academy suggested that I should instead pursue my Ph.D. and a different career path altogether. The more my wife and I considered this opportunity, the more it seemed to fit. But how could we afford to send me back to school, let alone support a family of four while doing so?

In late May of last year, less than a month after the seed had been planted, I initiated a conversation with our Department Chair about returning to Michigan to pursue my Ph.D. While the admission and funding process had ended several months earlier, my Department's faculty made an exception. To make this opportunity financially feasible for me and my family, I was offered a position as a Graduate Student Research Assistant. My research, as with the other GSRA's in my Department, is directly related to my dissertation and the fulfillment of my degree. I am indisputably here as a student and not an employee, grateful for the incredible opportunity I have been afforded. I enjoy a very close, professional relationship with my academic advisor and the other faculty members in my Department. At the core of this experience is the student-mentor relationship. I fear that this atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation will gradually erode should an employee-employer framework and mindset be allowed to prevail.

I was afforded an opportunity to return to Michigan this past fall due to the relative academic freedom each Department enjoys. As with the private-sector, it is the faculty and the faculty alone who are best positioned to sustain academic excellence at the Department level. They decide who to admit, what requirements need to be met to achieve Ph.D. candidacy, and ultimately comprise the dissertation committee. It should come as no surprise that this process works quite well, as the University of Michigan is commonly regarded as one of the best, top tier institutions in this country. As before, I fear this essential element of academic latitude will be marginalized through the introduction of a GSRA Union, in the well intentioned but misguided spirit of equality.